



The International Fancy Guppy Association



Dedicated to Promoting The Fancy Guppy Hobby

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Guppy Gambits

By Midge Hill

An outstandingly beautiful single male guppy, no matter how many trophies he may come home with, does not make a champion guppy strain... or a champion guppy breeder. You can be justifiably proud of your win in the single classes because the competition is brisk, but the secret of true champions in the guppy world is a strain of guppies that is capable of producing a number of matching males that are as close to carbon copies as possible.

In the single classes it doesn't matter whether a fish is from a true strain or from a random outcross. All that matters is that the guppy be a superb individual specimen. The quality of a strain becomes progressively more important in the matched male classes. Random outcrosses may produce beautiful individuals, but rarely will they produce two beautiful individuals that match in every characteristic well enough to win in the two-matched-male classes (known as Tank Classes), much less five outstanding mirror images needed to win in the Breeder Class.

Strains that have been developed to the point where they produce consistently uniform males of high quality are valuable and highly sought after. The time and effort and money that has gone into the development of such strains make them well worth the

If you were lucky enough, and smart enough, to locate and purchase breeding stock from one of the best strains available, and have paid attention to the raising of the offspring, even as a newcomer in the hobby you could already have guppies in your tanks capable of winning championships or helping you pay for your hobby. Even if these are the first show guppies you have ever raised, you can already be well ahead of more experienced guppy breeders who might have skimped on the purchase of their breeding stock and have had to struggle along wasting time and effort in trying to improve inferior stock. Naturally, this depends to a large degree on whether your care and conditions have allowed the fish to blossom to their full potential.

In evaluating a strain there are two major criteria: (1) how many show-quality individuals the strain produces, and (2) how closely the males match each other in color, size, finnage, etc. Even the best champion strains do not produce 100% show-stopper, look alike males. Perhaps only the top 10-20% will be uniform trophy caliber fish but, in a good strain, the also-tans will still resemble each other in the majority of traits and can usually be rated as extra-fancies. Relatively few should fall into the category of "junk fish."

In past articles we have discussed how to select those individuals that are of show quality. Now we'll take a look at matching. To find out just how well your guppy males really match each other, try picking out your five best males and putting them together in a separate container where you can see them from all sides. At first glance they may all look pretty much alike, but when you start comparing them feature for feature, as the judges of matched competitions do in a show, you can begin to appreciate the value of a good true-breeding strain. Are the caudals all exactly the same shape and size... or does one have an indentation here or an extended ray there, or perhaps one has a rounded corner or concave trailing edge? Is the color and pattern of the tail the same in each fish, or is one a little brighter color, another have a few streaks of darker color or a different iridescence where the tail leaves the peduncle? Are the dorsals the same width? Length? Shape? Color? Are the bodies all the same size and shape, or is one smaller or larger; what about the one that has a bulkier pot belly or a narrower peduncle? Are the body markings the same down to the various splashes or dots of color? Do the fish all carry their finnage equally well? This may all sound like nit picking, but I have seen shows where the presence or absence of one tiny black dot on the body meant the difference between first and second place.

It should also be noted here that fish with multi, or bicolor patterns in the finnage are apt to be less uniform than fish with solid colored caudals. Even in the purest of strains the patterned tails show more variation because of the added factor to the matching... pattern as well as color. When matching multis or bicolors for competition, select first for colors that match as closely as possible and then look for the closest pattern match from among those showing the desired color.

When you figure the odds of getting five trophy caliber males in the first place and then add in the odds of having them all matched in every characteristic you can begin to realize why the quality of a strain is the single most important thing in guppy raising. NO amount of super food or super care is going to give your guppies the genetic makeup needed for uniformity and show-quality characteristics.

When selecting guppies for show competition, most experienced exhibitors will select their matched male entries first, knowing that the combination of top quality and good matching is harder to attain than finding a single outstanding male. Winning in matched male classes is not only more prestigious but, deservedly, earns the breeder many more points toward the annual championship awards.

If, after evaluating your stock as to both the number of show quality individuals and the good matching of the males, your strain does not seem to measure up, don't automatically assume you were "taken" by the breeder from whom you purchased your strain. That is possible, of course, but it's usually not the case if you bought from a reputable breeder. It is a known fact that guppies react differently to different environmental factors. For example, guppies of the same strain may be one color in acid water and quite a different shade in alkaline water. Lights, temperatures, foods, water, etc., can all have visible effects on physical appearances. Unfortunately, when you acquired the guppies from the breeder, you could not hope to also acquire his identical set up and handling techniques. It sometimes takes several generations of working with a new strain to discover the conditions that will make it perform best for you, so don't be too hasty to blame the breeder. I once obtained breeding stock of a champion blue delta strain from one of the top breeders. In the first generation most of the males showed up with yellow and blue variegated tails... they weren't even very pretty. Knowing the breeder, I stuck with it and amazing as it may sound, after two generations had been raised in my tanks, the color settled down to a solid green,



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completely and honestly point each characteristic of each fish. If the point totals place the three fish in the same order as your original visual selection, you have mastered the point system well enough to feel confident you are not leaving your best fish at home when you enter a show.

From this point on you can safely use the same short cut method of selecting your best fish as is used by show judges, who cannot possibly point every fish in a class. Instead of going through the arithmetic of pointing each feature and adding up the total, judges who thoroughly know the standards and the values placed on each characteristic mentally start each fish with 100 points and deduct for any short comings the fish may have. Although this system usually comes out amazingly close to actually pointing the fish, judges still point fish completely in close contests and you will probably come out ahead by doing the same when in doubt.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

A renowned aquarist, Midge Hill, has been keeping and breeding guppies for twenty three years and is a member of the Guppy Haft of Fame. Active in the showing and judging of guppies throughout the United States from the time guppy competition first started in California. Midge has won numerous trophies, including an IFGA Championship for the Albino Class. The author was one of the founding members of the Pan Pacific Guppy Association in 1965 and served in many capacities for that association, including the office of president. She also originated its publication, "Guppy Roundtable" which she edited for six years while also serving as Guppy Judging Chairman and Seminar Instructor. Currently a lecturer, fish photographer, artist and author of numerous articles on guppies and related subjects. Midge is also active in the International Fancy Guppy Association where she has served as a member of the IFGA Judging Board since 1974. In addition, she edited the IFGA Bulletin for three years, Midge Hill is professionally associated with the aquarium hobby as one of the founders of Golden State Aquatics, Inc. and also as a Contributing Editor for Freshwater and Marine Aquarium Magazine.

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